



News from Congressman

Tom Lantos

**12th Congressional District of California
San Mateo/San Francisco**

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**FOR INFORMATION CALL
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Lantos Works to Undo Visa Blockade for Nurses from Abroad During Critical U.S. Shortage

Washington, DC – Congressman Tom Lantos (D-San Mateo, San Francisco) said it is “ridiculous” that, amid a nursing shortage, the United States is turning away large numbers of registered nurses from abroad due to bureaucratic constraints, and he pledged to address the situation with needed legislation at the start of the year.

“I am outraged that the efforts by the Department of Homeland Security to clear out a backlog of pending immigration cases will be keeping much-needed nurses coming from the Philippines and other countries,” Lantos said. “This is a ridiculous situation, given the shortage of nurses faced by hospitals in California and nationwide. I will introduce a bill at the start of the new Congress that will allow unused visas from prior years to be devoted immediately to alleviate this urgent problem. And I will explore longer-term solutions to what appears to be a growing lack of visas for new and qualified nurses from other countries who can help all Americans get the medical care they deserve.”

Until now, there have been enough immigrant and non-immigrant visas available under federal law that U.S.-based, registered nurses and other skilled workers applying for immigrant status from abroad have had their applications processed as soon as they were deemed qualified. But the State Department recently issued a public visa update stating that starting January 1, petitions filed from abroad for immigrant work visas or petitions for a change of immigrant status by qualified, U.S.-based applicants from the Philippines, China and India would be processed only if they had been filed before 2002. The bulletin noted that the immigrant visa quotas for people from these three countries would soon be reached, so any applications from 2002 onward would be processed only as new visas from those countries became available.

When a South San Francisco-based newspaper, The Philippine News, brought the issue to light this week, Congressman Lantos contacted the Administration to find out what could be done. He learned that with Congressional action, unused visas for people from the many countries where the quotas have not been met in previous years could be re-assigned to countries that have met the quotas.

“If there are more Filipino or Indian or Chinese nurses ready to meet U.S. needs, they should not be held back, particularly if visas for people with similar skills from other countries are going begging,” Lantos said. “And in the long run, we need to find solutions so that this situation does not arise in the first place.”

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